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# FINANCIAL TIMES

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## Lithuania rejects Gorbachev plan

NATIONALIST leaders in the Soviet republic of Lithuania yesterday angrily rejected President Mikhail Gorbachev's plans to defuse their demands for outright independence, as the Soviet leader urged and pleaded with ordinary workers to think again.

Meanwhile, Soviet authorities had "lost control" in the Azerbaijani city of Lenkoran, according to the Tass news agency. The local radio station was seized and a "provisional defence committee" had taken over responsibility for law and order.

Mr Gorbachev's vision of a radically-reformed federal state, with far-reaching autonomy for the constituent republics, failed to dampen the nationalist fervour on the streets and farms of the Baltic republic.

Crowds turned out to challenge his insistence that the country must stay together.

The leader of the republic's mass national movement rejected as "a cheap lie" his promise of a new law laying down precise details of how a dissident republic may leave the Soviet Union.

"This is a cheap lie, a lie for naive people in the West," Mr Vytautas Landsbergis, the music professor who heads the Sajudis movement, said. "I wonder if it came from him or someone suggested it to him. It means other people will decide for us."

In an emotional and often angry address to leading members of the Lithuanian intelligentsia on Thursday night, the



Mr Gorbachev again faced the people of Lithuania yesterday during his visit to the town of Siauliai

### The Soviet leader's vision of a reformed federal state failed to dampen nationalism. **Quentin Peel reports**

Soviet leader made clear that he would not allow Lithuania on its own to decide to quit the Soviet Union.

Ruling out the Lithuanian demand simply to hold its own referendum on the issue, he made clear that any new law would require approval for secession from the rest of the USSR.

As if to underline the depth of the nationalist challenge Mr Gorbachev is facing on all sides, Tass yesterday reported the death of a Soviet soldier in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, where Armenians are fighting Azerbaijanis to secede from that republic.

"What is going on concerns all the people," Mr Gorbachev said yesterday. "If tomorrow you just raise your hands and walk out of the Union, that is not politics. It is simply not serious."

"We have to deal with all the republics, with the whole state to decide all the questions."

Angry Lithuanians yesterday condemned the Soviet leader for his hectoring tone and angry words, although in other circumstances, his speech - which was broadcast in full on national Soviet television last night - would have been a masterpiece of impromptu oratory. He com-

bined reason with anger, and warm words with sharp criticism.

"You cannot be a Lithuanian but at least be a human being," one placard stated yesterday as he arrived at the town of Siauliai to visit a military base, a collective farm and a television factory.

The draft law promised by Mr Gorbachev appears to be not simply about how a republic may exercise its constitutional right to secede from the USSR - a right which has always existed on paper - but a law on the whole federal relationship between the 15 republics and the centre.

The Soviet leader challenged the Lithuanians to think again about staying in a real federation - admitting that the present Soviet state was nothing of the kind.

"We have to go through the real development of the sovereign state, united in a federation," he said. "Do you know what a federation is? How could you know? You have never lived in one. That is why you cannot give me any arguments that you know a federation."

The entire exercise launched by the Soviet leader in Lithuania, in the full blaze of Soviet television cameras and the international press, appears to be an attempt to sway the whole tide of Lithuanian nationalism with the power of his own personality.

If not, then it is an attempt to show the rest of the country that he has done everything in his power to keep the USSR intact.

Although officially his mission is to persuade the Lithuanian Communist Party not to break away from his all-union Soviet Communist Party, he has concentrated instead on the fundamental question of whether Lithuania will break away from the rest of the USSR.

Yet frequently his words met the same reaction. "We didn't ask to join the Soviet Union. We were occupied," a Lithuanian office secretary said, referring to the 1940 occupation by the Soviet Red Army. "So we don't need to ask to leave it."